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DEMOCRATIC STEERING AND
POLICY COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Congressman Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Statement to the House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission
June 21, 2023

Chair Robert Latta, Ranking Member Doris Matsui, Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr., and other members of this panel: I thank you for the opportunity to offer a statement for this important oversight hearing.

I am taking this opportunity to participate today to highlight the continuing scourge of unwanted, unsolicited robocalls on the lives of millions of Americans.

If you have a landline in your home or carry a cellular phone, and most Americans fit within at least one of these groups, then you are likely negatively impacted by the pervasive plague of robocalls.

For millions upon millions of Americans, it has become impossible to get through an entire meal or even a conversation without being interrupted by a robocall or an unwanted solicitation.

Candidly, I speak from personal experience. The landline in our home and my cellphone are flooded daily with robocalls. These calls drive my wife and I to the edge of madness.

Despite the flood of robocalls that have descended on our lives like a blanket of locusts, we have made important progress.

Mr. Pallone's bipartisan Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence (TRACED) Act has had a positive impact. The new law more empowered the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure phone providers have greater flexibility to block junk calls, and companies like Verizon has strengthened their anti-spam tools.

The TRACED Act also required the FCC to expand its enforcement and crackdown of robocallers, and in May 2020, the FCC complied. New FCC enforcement upped penalties, extended the statute of limitations for action, and built new partnerships to trace the origins of robocalls.

By fair metrics, we have seen results. In the past year alone, over 10 billion robocalls were blocked. Robocall volume has fallen, decreasing 11 percent last year. Record fines are being handed out.

And for their part, cell phone providers have done a lot to identify spam calls for Americans to make it easier to filter out, block, or ignore unwanted robocalls.

The Supreme Court has been a source of frustration in weakening our laws. It was no April Fool's joke when two years ago the Supreme Court nullified a prohibition in the Telephone Consumer Protection Act's that protected against autodialed calls and texts to cellphones without the called party's consent. In *Facebook, Inc. v. Duguid*, the Supreme Court interpreted a narrow definition of autodialer that practically applies to only a handful of autodialers.

The impact of this case was as expected, cellphones being bombarded with more robocalls and texts. While we make progress, we continue to have setbacks. Robocalls are still pervasive, relentless, and deeply irritating. We must make sure that callers are not breaking our laws and getting away with it.

So, this hearing is important to hear from the FCC on what more can be done. There are plenty of questions I would like to hear answers to from the Chair Rosenworcel.

1. Does FCC have the tools it needs in its toolbox to win the war against robocall spam? Should fines be larger? Does the FCC need a bigger budget to strengthen its enforcement and deterrence of nuisance mongers?
2. The FCC has said that it can reduce robocall volume by one-quarter over the next decade: is that an acceptable goal and is that enough?
3. Is there more Congress can do to address robocalls? Can and should we pass strengthening measures for the great TRACED Act? Are there are actions Congress can take to stop robocalls we are not contemplating?

I simply do not accept the excuse that because many robocalls originate overseas, there is little we can do to stop them. I don't accept that excuse and neither do millions of beleaguered Americans.

There are many important matters before Congress, weighty matters of life and death. But if government cannot create and maintain comfort and security in the daily lives of regular Americans, then we are failing in our posts.

While the absolute prevalence of cell phones has reordered our lives and made us available at virtually all moments and times, there is still something to be said for the importance of enjoying privacy in your own home.

They say a person's home is their castle. When we return into our homes, it is a respite from the hurly burly and hustle and bustle of the world. It is the very basis of our quality of life.

When we are denied that basic calm and peace of mind by robocalls, we lose something irreplaceable. Let's work together to put a stop to robocalls once and for all.

Thank you very much.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Pascrell Jr". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress